

'HomeGrown Tales' Workshop Report & Assessment for Cleveland Arts

Collaboration with young people of Middlesbrough Careers Club (16-18 age group), England UK

Duration: February 2002: 6 sessions

The workshops I led with the young people of Middlesbrough Careers Club formed the second stage of the 'Home-Grown Tales' project, and followed artist Adrian Moule's workshops engaging with material aspects and interpretation of the Lingfield Country Park site. On average 4 participants formed the group, not including staff and artist, with a minimum of 1 on the first occasion, and at most 5 persons on another.

To recall the aims of the workshops, the purpose proclaimed in the proposal outline was "to explore ideas of the virtual idyll as a prelude to redeveloping a real garden site, raising awareness of the motivations and objectives for the said garden's purpose". Further, the aim of the workshop activity – to prepare visual material which be contained in an interactive (navigational) virtual environment – was to act as contrast to other aspects of the project which involved actual gardening on site, involving natural materials and physical effort. It was also hoped that some form of discussion would be raised involving different perceptions of what a garden meant to the participating individuals and offered collective thoughts about the purpose of planting a garden and orchard at Lingfield Country Park, Coulby Newham, Cleveland.

Following, this document will document the workshop activity in hindsight and address the perceived outcome of the artist's aims and interaction with the group:

The group/artist contact and activity can be broken into three distinct stages of development. Firstly, the initial two sessions involved exploring concepts of gardens, and perceived interpretations. This involved a short slide presentation of concepts in Persian Gardens, a visit to 'Nature's World', Middlesbrough, and a commercial garden centre. Integral to this stage was a 'round-robin' question and answer session, whereby statements on gardens (inclusive of theory, anecdote, and cliché perspectives) were read out to each other, inciting a 'true' or 'false' response with reasons applied. This activity was done on both first and second sessions, to elicit the widest variety of responses from the workshop participants who turned up on the day. The result of this dialogue was productive and gauged preconceived ideas about what each of the group imagined a garden to be and for what purpose.

Stage 1 Learning Outcomes:

- * Understanding theoretical concepts and perceptions.
- * Introduction to garden culture from other parts of the world (e.g. Iran).
- * Structured individual and collective opinion forming and discussion.
- * Using a digital camera to gather research images.
- * Raise awareness of (garden) products and marketing (use of colours, words etc.)

The 'round-robin' discussion openly shared opinions, and would act as a good index of ideas development throughout the whole Home-grown project. I would be interested for the statements to be updated and previous responses questioned.

The visit to 'Nature's World' and the garden centre offered an opportunity to see 'constructed' garden environments and consider colours, images and text presented in garden products. Many digital photographs were taken for possible use later in the workshops, however it turned out that these were not used. It could be argued that going to visit the garden centre in winter meant that the cold weather prohibited creativity and an enthusiasm to explore, but it was useful to include a sense of context when discussing the statements.

The following stage of the workshop involved 4 sessions at the computer suite in the City Learning Centre (CLC), Eston, Cleveland. The aim of the workshop was to generate visual content for the virtual environment and introduce digital imaging and the scanner as part of a creative process. This was achieved in several ways: felt-tip drawing and scanning into computer, cut photos collaged on the scanner, and basic image manipulation using filters/layers in Adobe Photoshop. The workshop participants fitted their own skills, ability, or sense of experiment to either of these methods of image creation. Hence all, with a wide variety of ability, and no previous knowledge of using a scanner or imaging software, could contribute to the process. The fluctuating number of participants, on average 3 or 4, meant that individual assistance could be offered to assist scanning, using the software etc., however I would comment that 4 was the maximum number of 'first-time users' that could be managed without support guidance (i.e. tutorial sheets) for using the software.

Stage 2 Learning Outcomes:

- * Using a scanner both as a input and creative tool in digital imaging.
- * Using Adobe Photoshop 6.0 to resize, manipulate, and process images.
- * Developing artwork as part of a digital process

As a result of the workshops at the CLC certain one or two individuals were enthused by the possibilities of Photoshop, and produced some great images as a result of manipulating the original drawings. Further, a few remarked that they like to get a scanner for a home computer, which was

previously only used for Internet access and document work. However I feel as the workshop coordinator, and despite showing an example virtual environment, it was difficult for the group to get their heads round the concepts involved in producing the content for the virtual space.

It could be argued, that due to the nature of the final 'art product' the workshops had more of the function of 'harvesting' content than producing the end results. The images created during the workshops involved a large amount of post-processing to be imported into the virtual game environment Unreal™ Editor.

The process of creating the virtual environment began following a session with the group involving design and layout of the proposed 'virtual garden'. This was facilitated in consultation to the real architectural plan of the site, and the images that were imported into the virtual environment editor. Using colour coding, the participants indicated where the generated art content would be placed in the virtual space, conceptually building a link between the virtual and physical space.

Stage 3 Learning Outcomes:

- * Introduction to virtual environment design
- * Understanding concepts of the relationship between real and virtual space
- * Using colour-coding and indexing to display information
- * Design process

A further session, in conjunction with local writer Helen Rennie, generated haiku poems responding to the space at Lingfield Country Park. These were recorded - to be placed among the visual content in the virtual environment. As the person moves around, exploring the virtual environment, they will encounter the poems as spoken word, creating an augmented relationship to a certain place in the virtual space.

The final stage of involvement - completing virtual environment completion process - took longer than was anticipated. This superseded the 1 day allocated to the artist for follow-up and completion work, and should be considered if further such projects using this technology are to be funded. Although this author understands that all digital art workshops generally involve more time than other art development workshops pre- and post contact time to create results, more understanding is necessary from the funding (organisations') point of view to compensate these issues.

Overall, the virtual environment produced as a result of the group's content, and response to the theme of 'virtual idyll', proved to be adventurous, visually bold, attractive and innovative. Possibly

as a result, it seems that the virtual space will be a container and vessel for other sections of the Home-grown project with the Careers Club. Ironically with the aim to create a static virtual garden, in contrast to the real space, it seems that interactive environment will be a work-in-progress, evolving with further content and no set date of completion. Although, as discussed above, issues should be raised about when does a workshop activity morph, changing shape to be a development art product, and so treated as such, this artist welcomes the process.

I believe that there was / is not enough time, within this artists involvement, to gauge if the group could make comparisons or contrasts between the process of making a real garden and a virtual one. It is my recommendation that time is scripted for such a dialogue further onwards in the project. Speaking for myself, I enjoyed working with the Careers Club, the challenges of a fluctuating group number, and also the technical and creative process. Using computers, software or technology in an art development setting always pushes the artist (workshop coordinator) into avenues or approaches not previously explored, either through demand or problem solving. This occasion has been no different, and I have had to develop and experiment in new ways with the technology given, to satisfy the group's aims and ambitions. More often it should be noted that art development in community settings *includes* the artist involved, though sadly it is only most recognisable in such circumstances.

APPENDIX: 'HomeGrown Tales' Definitions & Glossary

Garden

Reference: Pugh, S. (1988). *Garden-nature-language*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

"The garden is a pervasive metaphor in culture (not just of the West). The metaphoric reference point of gardens is the idea of the garden as paradise, the site of travesty, a falling away of bliss, but also the site of childhood, of both pre-cultural bliss and of acculturation. As a lost state that is recreated through representation, the garden is the site of desire. An understanding of the garden must start here." (p.2)

garden a place of leisure, rather than work - all elements of work are hidden and it as free and 'natural'.

"Set against this expedient use of the garden is the image of the garden as a representation of paradise, proposed as a 'state to return to', a return to bliss, redemption. But is the garden really a 'remade Eden', a nostalgic recreation made as a constant reminder of 'where are we going', to heaven, to the millennium, to utopia?.. This image of the garden can be a gross oversimplification of a complex construction of images of innocence, purity and mindless happiness. As a model of paradise, the garden haunts and taunts, but the garden is more of an antidote to paradise, the model of a place escaped *from*, however much it seems to suggest a return *to* it. The benefits of escape seem all too clear: self-determination, progress, identity, release from the barbarism of nature". (p.3)

The pleasure of the garden, the desire to be there
a place of stasis

Gardens as a story, a circuitous journey, a pilgrimage, marked out by statues, buildings, vantage points (views).

Most people have the idea of gardens as pleasurable retreat.

- "This is the life!" seems to sum up everything that real life isn't:
- doing nothing
- relaxing in the shade
- fantasising about what life should be like but would be unbearable if it was always like that

The garden is a consummate (accomplished) image of holiday and travel to exotic places, relaxation, leisure, retirement, 'creative ownership and naturalness'.

"the garden is a geographical and topographical (scenery) no-place" (p.9)

"the walls around the garden are the rules, the frame, which define the possible, the permissible". (p.10)

"the garden has a curious way of being part of country and city and neither. Always separate from the countryside, its rhetoric is transferable to the city (the park, the suburban garden); a product of city-thinking, the garden is the resort, the retreat, retirement 'to grow roses' (p.10)

virtual

- almost or nearly as described but not completely.
- not physically existing.

virtual reality

- computer generated simulation of a three-dimensional environment that can be interacted with.

idyll

- a blissful or peaceful period or situation.
- a short description in writing (verse or prose) of a picturesque pastoral scene or incident.

from Oxford dictionary 10th edition (1999)

pastoral

- 'an urban poet's nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the countryside from a romantic perspective',

showing the best side of life by hiding its miseries

past as an innocent time...longing for innocence and happiness...
mythic golden age...

'the good old days.....'

(related to a moving to live and work in the city during the industrial revolution)

The pastoral can also be applied to any work which 'envision[s] a withdrawal from ordinary life to a place apart, close to the elemental rhythms of nature, where wo/man achieves a new perspective on life in a complex social world.

In the pastoral garden the outside world remains apart from the narrative within and only invades as a highly ritualised drama: Statues. The Horse and Lion are locked in static conflict, a ritualised battle; the dying swain as art not death, a copy of an admired statue; peeping from a bush a statue looks out;

APPENDIX: 'HomeGrown Tales' Workshop Garden Statements

The initial two sessions of the workshop involved exploring concepts of gardens, and perceived interpretations. Integral to this stage was a 'round-robin' Question-Answer session, whereby statements on gardens (inclusive of theory, anecdote, and cliché perspectives) were read out to each other in the group (and directly to the person on sitting to the left), inciting a 'true' or 'false' response with reasons applied. This activity was done on both first and second sessions, to elicit the widest variety of responses from the workshop participants who turned up on the day. The result of this dialogue was productive and measured preconceived ideas about what each of the group imagined a garden to be, and for what purpose.

**** planting a tree is one of the noblest acts of optimism***

True, you are giving it a chance to grown and flourish, other people are going to see the tree in a future and it will be there several generations and will be there for along time after you have died.

**** natural landscapes are not yet gardens***

False, to some people any open space that the public has access to that can be there garden, this is my garden, this is my space.

Agree. The garden is close to where we live, while the countryside is faraway.

Disagree. They both are made of the same materials and content.

Agree. Gardens are manmade, organised and *manufactured*.

**** the garden is a place of childhood***

True, as a child you always looked forward to playing the garden, or playing on swings, wishing the weather to be good so you could explore and play.

Agree. Swings where you play, explore the outdoors maybe for the first time. Make games, roles and stories from the imagination (the theatre?). Using mud as play material, being dirty.

Disagree. I wasn't allowed to play in the garden as I'd ruin it they said.
Innocence or mischief.

**** the garden is a place of leisure rather than work***

True, people go to a garden to relax and work, people work on a garden to relax and take the mind of the daily strains so the garden is a place of leisure.

Disagree. You can do your (home) work in the garden as an alternative, relaxed place
Perception – for some it is a labour of the love to keep a garden. If it looks good (i.e you've put in the work) you will want to spend time in it as leisure.

**** the garden is paradise***

False, what one persons view of paradise is may not be anothers.
Agree.

**** the garden is a place which we as humans have escaped from***

False, how can you escape from a garden? illogical, does the garden have a boundary.

**** the garden is a place that is desirable to be in***

True, people like to have BBQ etc in summer and people like to build snowmen in the win the winter and then you sometimes you like to sunbath on your own.
Agree.

**** the garden is a story***

True, the garden is part of the house, so what ever the story of the person who owned the house there would be a story of the person who had the garden, so everyone has a story to tell about there garden.

**** the garden is a journey***

True, bigger gardens you walk around, you take a path that takes you around the garden on a journey, to look around and explore.

True. The journey can be physical as a walk round the garden, and it can be a mental memory afterwords, remembering.

True. A journey in time. As the garden grows and gets older, we are watching, attached but not attached.

True. A journey through seasons, spring, summer, autumn, winter.
Plants - packlunch?

**** the garden represents the feeling "this is the life!"***

False, what turns one person one does not turn another one on, so to some people a garden will mean nothing but to others it will mean something and they will have passion for it?

True. It is trouble to keep a garden, like life needs effort – it is what you make it?
Time of year and seasons reflect change. It is a symbol of being grown up, responsible. A possession.

Disagree. I have nothing to do with it.

"I hate bees, I love birds, little ants are alright. Daddy longlegs they make you sick them ones."

**** the garden reminds people of holidays and exotic places.***

True, many people like to bring illegal plants back from holidays etc to plant in the garden to remind them of the holiday etc.

Agree. As it is a place to relax on a sunny day – similar to the activity of many on holiday on the beach. Assume the same role? However each person has different attitudes in different environments.

**** the garden is where you spend time when you are retired 'to grow roses'.***

True, but this statement is a little stereotypical the garden is not just for old people and not just to grown roses.

**** the walls of the garden are the rules, the picture frame***

False, you can grown things higher than a wall and you can grown things on them.

Disagree. The garden can come into the home, as you look out from inside through a window (visual inclusion in the home), and as a conservatory (inside and outside space).

You can see over walls onto other trees and other gardens. Birds and weather are not bounded by the walls, though they are affecting the garden in different ways.

**** the garden is actually no place in particular***

False, some people live in a house with a garden and some people do not, but went to parks etc that would be there garden, so everyone has a garden.

**** the garden is part of the country, part of the city and neither.***

True, it is possible to have a garden in the country and a garden in the city and it is also possible to have neither because people may not have a garden at all.

Agree. My garden is my imagination. A garden is what you make it. If only a window box then that is you garden. I have no garden me

**** the garden is a place to dry your clothes***

True, it is a space to be utilised for the family, it is also, drying clothes on a washing line rather than a tumble dryer is more

**** the garden is a place to hide***

True, the garden was a place to hide, at Easter used to hide eggs in the garden and you used to have to find them, also a place to hide and be left alone.

**** the garden is a place to play sports***

True, as a child used to play football a lot, lucky because had trees in the garden which was used as goalposts.

**** gardens and orchards grow good things to eat***

True, its good that people appreciate the food from where it comes from.

*** *who needs a garden?***

False, no one needs a garden, it is not a life and death situation, everyone could go without a garden, it is not a necessity to life.

True. Everyone needs one. Maybe not possess personally but to be able to be near plants, trees, (nature) is a basic human need. to relax?

*** *Everyone should have a garden but only if they look after it?***

False, it fly's in the face of individualism, if you don't know how to garden you wont have the knowledge.

Disagree. Not everyone has to have a garden to themselves. They could share a public garden, such as a park.

APPENDIX: 'HomeGrown Tales': Workshop schedule

Working with Middlesbrough Careers Club (approximately 8 –10 participants) on developing artistic responses to the Lingfield Country Park.

Currently waste ground. The ground will be working in the park, planting fruit trees, and cultivating a wildflower meadow.

Artistic Programme

Stage 1.

Visual Artist Adrian Moule works with the group looking at environmental art (Andy Goldsworthy, Richard Long, Chris Drury, Smithson etc) and leads the group to respond to the space, creating natural effects and recording the work in photographs.

Provisional dates:

January	Mon – 7	On site
	Wed - 9	Visit to Middlesbrough Art Gallery to view and respond to the exhibition
	Thurs – 10	On site
	Monday 14	On site
	Wed – 16	On site
	Thurs – 17	On site

Val Magee works with the group to stimulate written responses to the site, using historical documents, deeds, maps etc as stimulus to place the space in a historical context.

Provisional date

January	Tues 22	On site/archives/library
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Stage 2.

Andrew Paterson works with the group to develop virtual representation of the space exploring how the garden may look in 50 years time, and the relationship between the real and the ideal garden.

Provisional dates

February	Wed 6 On site Introductions. to actual garden space. to each other, including showing of my virtual garden project. to ideas of paradise/ideal gardens in different cultures. <i>'harmony with nature'</i> Discussion and recording of initial response/thoughts.
Thurs 7	Visit to garden centre/botanical garden products and tools- how are they presented: record colours, graphics, slogans, words. themes: enhanced and perfected - chemical / natural space - extension of the domestic, private space. de-lineated. exotic? <i>'nature brought under control'</i>
Wed 13	Computer Suite (University/Abingdon School/Shape) Process thoughts. download/scan images into computer. record text into computer as document. record text spoken word onto mini-disc. Use sound-edit software to prepare audio for virtual space.
Thus 14	Computer suite (University/Abingdon School/Shape/City Learning Centre) Digital image exploration and collage. (Scanner, Digital Camera and Photoshop workshop. Search, gather and create images to be used within virtual space Inspiration may be found in computer game landscapes and garden centre images.
Wed 20	1/2 day (University/Abingdon School/Shape) Introduction to virtual edit space using Unreal Editor Converting images to textures for virtual environment 1/2 day Collaborative planning and visual design layout
Thurs 21	1/2 day Collaborative planning and sound design layout 1/2 day Testing and tweaking design

Val Magee works with group responding to work so far and developing more text and spoken word.

Provisional date: February Tues 26

Stage 3.

Les Simpson works with the group to respond to the work/ideas produced so far and the space itself, in drama, movement and voice. Developing scenes/sketches and performances that can be recorded on video and performed live. This period of work can include a research visit to a play, film or performance that will stimulate ideas and responses and raise awareness of the performing arts.

Provisional Dates:

March	Wed 6	On site
	Thurs 7	On site/ performance
	Wed 13	On site/performance space
	Thurs 14	On site/performance space
	Wed 20	On site/performance space
	Thurs 21	On site

Showcase: The work will then be edited/rehearsed and presented at a public showcase in the country park.

Date to be arranged.